

Nigeria

Family

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Nigerians view family as a source of strength and comfort. Traditionally, extended family networks were very important, and members of the extended family provided assistance to other members in need. In the past, married couples lived with the husband's family, and raising children was seen as the responsibility of the entire family, with relatives assisting with childcare and discipline. In many families, particularly among lower-income families and in rural and suburban areas, this network of support remains in place, and extended families often share a home or live in the same compound.

However, in much of the country, family relations are in a state of transition. In urban areas and among the wealthy, people more often live as nuclear families. Emphasis is shifting from the extended family to the nuclear family, and fewer people now seek or provide help within the extended family. In recent years, migration to urban areas has also weakened traditional family ties, as families become more spread out and young people grow up away from their extended families.

Family size varies according to region and family situation. An urban couple often has four or five children, while a rural family may have as many as ten or twelve. A polygamous household may contain twenty or more children.

Parents and Children

In most families, children live with their parents until marriage or until they reach their late twenties or early thirties; it is increasingly rare for children to live with their families after marriage. Children are taught to be unassertive, quiet, and respectful in their interactions with adults. They help with chores from a young age, often doing tasks like washing dishes, shopping, fetching water, and ironing clothes. Children may also help on the family farm or work to support the family, often by trading in the market. Child trafficking and forced labor are common in Nigeria, particularly among orphans and children from poor families.

Nigerians have deep respect for their elders. Grown children usually support their aging parents financially, often sending them money on a monthly basis. Women usually help their parents and in-laws maintain the household, while men often help with errands.

Gender Roles

In general, Nigerian families are male dominated. Men make most major decisions related to the family. When a husband dies, leadership of the family generally passes to the oldest son rather than the wife. Men are responsible for supporting the family financially, though other family members may also contribute. Women are traditionally responsible for the household and children. Women who work outside the home maintain these responsibilities, regardless of the other demands on their time. A growing number of men help with household chores and childcare. Middle-class and wealthy families may hire household help, in which case the woman is responsible for supervising the employees.

Muslim women are often sheltered. Most non-Muslim women enjoy relatively more freedom, both in influencing family decisions and openly trading at the marketplace. Many families are headed by women who give birth outside of wedlock, are divorced, or are widowed. The role of women outside the home has expanded in recent years. About 48 percent of women work outside the home, often working as tailors, nurses, caterers, restaurant workers, housekeepers, receptionists, and owners of small shops. Women are active in politics but hold relatively few seats in Parliament.

Despite these gains, women still face significant discrimination in society. While the 1999 constitution granted women equal rights, traditional and religious customs often favor men. Many families do not send their girls to school because of a belief that learning to be good mothers and wives is more important than formal education. Women without civil marriages are not entitled to inheritance upon the death of their husbands and are often left without income or savings. Married women must have their husbands' consent in order to leave the country or obtain a passport. Women cannot purchase property and may find it difficult to obtain bank loans. Domestic violence is common and legal as long as it does not result in serious injury. Female circumcision is widely practiced, though less frequently among the younger generation.

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